3:Westermann E-5 (1910) 1912 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

here articles of purchase and sale are calculated in silver currency.

The daily work of the women is cooking, carrying water, cleaning the house and yard, etc. During the time of farmwork they help the men in cultivating the fields.

FOOD

The staple food is dura. It is cooked, baked into a bread *(kwɛn)*, roasted, brewed and, when green, eaten raw. For different kinds of food vide page 102. Their diet is rather monotonous, dura being its constant chief component. The dura is pounded and ground. The mortar is either a log of wood hollowed out, or a flat excavation in the ground, limed out with clay. The mill-stones — a large and a small one, with the latter the grinding is done — are secured from districts west of the Shilluk country. — Fire is made by twirling a hard stick on a soft piece of wood.

Besides dura they eat sesame, duchn, maize, beans, some onions, various grass seeds, the seeds of the lotus plant and of some kinds of nymphaeae. The fruit of several trees, as deleïb, nabag, etc. also serve as food; they even rob ant hills to procure the winter store of hoarded seeds. White ants, when in the winged state, are a delicacy to them. — Milk is used in the household in many ways: it is drunk fresh, sour, or boiled, or dura meals are prepared with it. They also make butter, by shaking or rolling the milk in a gourd. — As domestic animals are almost never slain, meat forms no part of the daily food, but is rather an exceptional delicacy, which is, however, sought for with eagerness; of game they hardly leave any piece uneaten, skin and bowels not excepted; they do not even despise dead animals. The blood of killed animals is kept and cooked, but they do not tap the blood from living cattle, as is the custom with the Bari and Masai. — Generally they prefer the meat of castrated animals.

Two chief meals are taken daily; one from nine to ten in the morning, and the second at sunset.

BREWING OF BEER

A large quantity of the dura the people reap is used in cooking merisa or beer. The grain is put into jars and water poured on it. Thus it is left till the grain begins to sprout. Then it is spread in the sun to dry, and then pounded or ground; this wet meal is mixed with flour from the fresh grain and put a second time into jars which are filled with water. After stirring and mixing well, a little dry meal is sprinkled on it; the jars are covered with small mats and allowed to remain a day or two, until it begins to ferment, when a little more water and meal are added. When the whole mass is well fermented it is filtered through a grass funnel, and the following day is ready for use. It will keep about a week. Though this drink is slightly intoxicating, it does not seem to do great harm; it is very nourishing, and the natives regard it rather as a food than a beverage.

16: Cann G-5 (ca. 1928) 1929 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN IDLE SHILLUK.

By Captain G. P. Cann.

WHILE passing through the river ports of the Central District of the Upper Nile Province a casual observer is prone to comment on the apparent idleness of the Shilluk, as if it was the normal state of the tribe; and although such a traveller is probably within his rights in drawing this conclusion from the abnormal conditions under which he meets the Shilluk in river ports—for the native of the Southern Districts of the Sudan has certainly achieved a high standard in the art of doing nothing when on holiday—he is desired to remember that the Shilluk seen on the river bank on the arrival of a steamer is keenly interested (and even amused) in all the strange sights that meet his eye: the steamer itself with its tiers of decks with the Rais and sailors on the roof, the motley collection of humanity on the barges, and by no means least the *buing* or foreigner with his hated camera and amazing dress and incredible customs.

Can one wonder, then, that the Shilluk is prepared to stand for hours and simply gaze on such interesting sights?

The writer is 'on trek' at the moment, and is so struck by the strong relief afforded by village life that he has fallen to the use of the pen in vindication of the libelled Shilluk.

Awaking long before dawn one finds that smoke fires amongst the cattle have been kept up assiduously throughout the night, and already shadowy forms are passing amongst the herds and moving a beast where necessary to get more benefit from the smoke.

Dawn approaches and the herds are becoming restless, so every man turns to to release them, and four or five youths drive the cattle away some two or three miles inland, where flies are known to be less troublesome, and a first feed of dry grass is available to start the day.

Almost immediately hosts of small boys appear on the scene, the smaller ones—from seven to ten years of age—to bring out the goats and sheep from the *luaks* in which they have passed the night, safe from

16: Cann G-5 (ca. 1928)1929 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

233 512 857 the depredations of hyænas, and the boys of from ten to fifteen years to clear up the standings of the cattle, collect the head ropes, and clean out the *luaks*.

By the time the boys have finished their duties the cattle are brought back to the village for milking, and the small boys leave with their herds of sheep and goats for pasture and are not seen again until nearly sunset.

[556] Milking is accompanied by much grooming and cleaning of the cattle, and is one of the proudest hours of the Shilluk's life when he handles his beasts in view of the world.

233 512 883 At about 10.30 a.m. the cattle are driven to their damp pasture accompanied by an escort of fighting youths who are responsible for protection against wild beasts, reptiles and predatory human beings.

[226] Cattle and sheep herding by day is the work of youths and boys, and is full-time employment from dawn to dusk—varied by a certain amount of fish-spearing as a recreation—so we will leave them to their duties and turn to the older men to see to what extent the stigma of laziness applies to them.

241 462 512 [361] At the time of writing the first rains have fallen, so every able-bodied man who is not engaged in cattle herding leaves for his cultivation area—which is generally at least three miles inland from the village—before dawn; this early start becomes of vital importance when the dura is first sown, as the guinea-fowl descend from the trees at dawn to consume the seed sown on the previous day, and the cultivator is thus unable to leave his plot until after dusk, when these fowl have gone to roost.

462 512 Women bring food and water to the cultivator twice a day besides carrying out their ordinary household duties which we will now survey.

[361] 512 [415] 482 Shilluk villages for freedom from mosquitoes and other reasons are usually situated from one to three miles away from the Nile, and before dawn one or two women or girls from each house have to go to the river to fill all their available earthen pots and gourds with water for the use of the house before the men go away to work; the ordinary earthen vessel or *puk* when full weighs between thirty and forty pounds, and two or even three trips have to be made to the river daily to supply the needs of the home, so water carrying can only be done by the stronger women and girls.

16: Cann G-5 (ca. 1928) 1929 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

Houses are swept out soon after dawn by older women and small girls, and they are responsible for the collection of firewood for cooking purposes.

Very soon after the return of the water-carrying party the sound of dura pounding is heard on all sides, and this work and the preparation of native beer for the household goes on intermittently all day; the meal times for men being about 10 a.m. and 7 p.m., while the women snatch meals at odd hours.

At the time of writing every spare moment of the day is spent by the women in sowing the dura and maize crop around the village, the work proceeding steadily from dawn to dusk.

Even after dark the women have to finish the preparation and serve the evening meal to their men, and, as this is the main meal of the day, woe betide the wife who has not prepared it in time or to the satisfaction of her lord!

At about 5.30 p.m. the small boys return with the goats and sheep, and these—after having been re-united with their offspring—are turned into the *luaks* for the night.

Then smoke fires are lighted in readiness for the cattle which are herded in at dusk, tied up with head ropes, and milked; these duties keep nearly all the men busy until after 7 p.m., soon after which the cultivators return from their labours.

Rather than call the Shilluk a lazy race, let us say that they understand the art of taking their ease restfully!

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

of frenzied barking, as all the mongrels in the place, suddenly galvanized into life at the appearance of a stranger, give tongue to their displeasure and make a concerted rush with the evident intention of tearing me to pieces. I shout to one or two youths loitering near and ask them to call off the dogs, but to no avail, so I seize a stick and get in a telling smack or two on some which have ventured too near, and disperse the rest with a few well-aimed lumps of cotton soil. They retreat to a safe distance barking and growling threateningly, but at least I can make my way into the village in peace. There is little astir; a few men squat near the cow byre gossiping while one lies prostrate on the ground with the village hairdresser anointing his hair with a mixture of red mud, oil and ashes as a preparation for building it up into an elaborate coiffure. Most of the women have not yet returned from their daily trudge to the river for water, but the spirals of smoke rising from behind the reed fences which surround the individual homesteads indicate that some of the more industrious housewives have already begun to prepare the morning meal. A group of small children, pot-bellied and large-eyed, soon run to surround the Father and his bicycle; gravely they scrutinize him and his mount while some shyly offer him the customary Shilluk greeting, '*Yi bi*—You have come'. The bolder spirits among them venture to come closer to investigate the wonder of his wrist watch, putting their ears against it to hear its ticking with smiles of amazement and delight.

The children follow the priest as he wheels his cycle across the open space to where the knot of idlers is sitting near the cattle byre. The village chief who is among them rises courteously to greet the white man; '*Jal duong*,' he says, '*Yi nin*: Great one, you have slept.' I answer him in accustomed fashion, '*Yi nut*: You are here,' and then each man of the group greets me separately and receives his answer. I seat myself in the place of honour on the chief's mat and smoke a cigarette with him, discussing the prospects of the crops and making enquiries about certain ones in whom I am interested. Soon I excuse myself and go off in search of my

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
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Chapter IV

SHILLUK LIFE

The Shilluk country is for the most part flat, low-lying grass-land. The river by constant pressure frequently breaks through its containing banks and, sweeping away the soft soil, inundates the land lying behind them. Since nothing is done to repair the broken banks, these inundations increase each year as with the rise of the Nile the waters creep ever further inland, receding only slowly with the fall of the flood waters. As a consequence of this, Shilluk villages are usually built well back from the river, at least half a mile from the highest point of the flood. Usually, too, they are built along the main road passing from Kaka to Tonga. In some areas, particularly in the Detwok-Kodok locality, villages can be found several miles inland, even up to as much as fourteen miles. In such places the people depend for their water supplies on the scum-covered water holes dug here and there. Naturally, under conditions like this personal hygiene is somewhat at a discount, and social or parochial calls present their own problems. During the dry season the Nile is the only source of water for most villages, even those situated miles away from the river. At Detwok, for instance, it is a common sight to see the women of Aguno trudging past the mission at six o'clock in the morning, having already walked five miles. In half an hour or so they will be on their way back balancing their full water-pots on their heads. They cannot reach their homes again before nine o'clock when they will have to set to work to grind millet and prepare the morning meal. If they are careful with the water it may last for two days, but then they will have to pick up the large earthenware pots and take the hated road to the Nile more than five miles off. Once when I happened to be passing through

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

like bellows, and then passes it on. Pipe and beer circulate freely, and under the mellowing influence of both, tongues are quickly loosened and conversation turns to the perennial topic of cattle. After a while, your cigarette finished, you will excuse yourself to your host and, rising from your cramped position, greet everyone present in turn and make your escape into the open air.

The Shilluk, sensible man, starts his day with the sun. He emerges from his hut, however, with heavy head and bloodshot eyes, since he has been sleeping for seven or eight hours in a small windowless hut with the doorway blocked with a heavy grass mat and perhaps a smoky fire burning as a protection against mosquitoes. As a further defence against these pests he covers himself from head to foot with the red ashes from the cow-dung fire, but this does not worry him; if there is water handy he may rinse his hands and face, if not, he will remain as he is until his next visit to the river —perhaps today, perhaps tomorrow or the next day—gives him the chance of taking a bath.

Gradually the village comes to life: the women appear, winding their drab-looking cloths round them, and set off on their daily pilgrimage to the river with the heavy water pots balanced on their heads. The little group breaks up and the women fall into line, one behind the other, as they reach the narrow track leading out of the village, chattering like starlings as they swing along. The boys come out of the byre smothered like their elders in the red ashes in which they have been lying all night, looking like imps from the lower regions. They begin to clean up round the tethered cattle, collecting the cow dung and spreading it out to dry in the sun for fuel. When this is done they milk the cows and goats. From one compound comes the sound of dull thumping as some girl pounds the millet grain into coarse flour. The grain is small and hard, red or white in colour. It is first winnowed by being poured at shoulder height from a basket and then sieved in a boat-shaped scoop of plaited fibre. The grain is then put into a

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

narrow circular hole in the ground about a foot deep, and steadily pounded with a heavy, six-foot pole wielded with all the strength a young pair of arms and shoulders can bring to the task. The coarse flour which results from this operation is soaked in water and then ground again, this time between two hard, rough stones. The flour is ready for use; it is mixed with water and boiled in a shallow iron dish to make a thick porridge, and this, flavoured with a little salt if that is available, and mixed with a little milk, constitutes the meal. Young women, however, are denied the luxury of milk, unless they are nursing a baby.

By the time the women have returned from the river, ground the flour and cooked the porridge, it is already nine o'clock. If it is the dry season and there is no work to be done in the fields, the men have been sitting around since sunrise busy perhaps with some task such as making a grass rope or weaving a fish trap, or merely gossiping away the time until their food is ready. When a woman has cooked her husband's breakfast she takes it into the living hut, and then leaves while he eats. She never eats with him, though she may return later, before he has finished, and eat her own meal sitting apart; she may also join other women and eat with them. When breakfast is over the men resume their tasks, and if there is a nice part of the river bank shaded with trees, such as is to be found at Detwok, they will take their rope making and weaving materials or their fishing net and pass the day there pleasantly enough. The young boys untether the bleating sheep and goats which pour out of the village running in search of grass and water, followed by their herds who add to the din by yelling and whistling; the cattle follow at a more leisurely pace in charge of the older boys. Soon the village is empty of animals save for the mangy, half-starved dogs nosing about for scraps of food, and the scraggy chickens picking up grains of millet scattered here and there in the compound. The little girls appear, staggering under the weight of the fat babies they carry on their hips. The women and the older girls go about the never-ending household tasks, cleaning up after their untidy menfolk,

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
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512 pounding and grinding the flour in preparation for the evening meal. Some of them will go off to the neighbouring [439] forest to collect firewood to sell to the mission, or they will gather some of the small eggs their undersized hens produce and take them to the Sisters to sell or exchange for a little oil or salt or cloth.

So the day passes: the village drowses under the fierce heat of midday and afternoon, but comes to life again as evening approaches. The men return from the river bringing the results of their day's labour, a few stout cow ropes, a new doormat, or a string of fish to supplement the supplies for the evening meal. The cattle stream in again and are tied up and milked by the boys, the dried cow dung is collected into heaps and set on fire and soon a cloud of thick, acrid smoke drifts low over the village. Fires begin to twinkle through the gathering dusk as preparations are made in the various [262] compounds for the cooking of supper—boiled millet flour again with perhaps the addition of a little fish. The moon is nearly full and by the time supper is finished is sailing high in the heavens, lighting up the village with silvery brilliance.

512 It is the invitation to the dance. A huge fire is lighted in the 535 middle of the dancing floor, the drums are brought out and —on with the dance. Food is plentiful at present and the fishing has been good of late, so they dance because they are happy. Or perhaps food is scarce and there is no fish to be had, and supper has been meagre, or even non-existent. They dance just the same to try to forget their emptiness and misery. Any excuse will suffice, or no excuse at all. The tom-toms begin to throb, boy faces girl, and the dance begins. The booming of the drums and the yelling of the dancers, assisted by a gentleman who winds the same three [533] notes on a kudu horn with maddening persistency, defeat all attempts at sleep in the mission half a mile away. We thump our wet pillows and call down blessings on the merrymakers. The revels continue far into the night, but at last, about midnight, even the Shilluk have had enough and, exhausted, crawl into their huts to sleep. Silence falls on the place, but it is shortly broken by the mournful howl of a prowling hyena.

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
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Immediately every dog in the district is awake and alert and the peace of the night is shattered by a cacophony of furious barking. In the mission we thump our wet pillows and call down blessings on the dogs and the hyena. Eventually quiet is restored as the hyena's howls die away in the distance. The village sleeps.

Such then, in brief, is a description of Shilluk village life, yet our understanding of these people would be very incomplete without a more detailed picture of their activities, their work and their play. To them, as to most of the inhabitants of the continent of Africa, the common saying, 'to work like a black', is scarcely applicable, for the Shilluk is no fonder of work than the next man, and he is not one of those restless individuals who are never happy unless busy with hand and brain making and mending and improving. Yet there are times when he must bestir himself, for he is essentially self-supporting. From soil and river he must provide himself with what he requires for food and shelter, and beyond this bare minimum of subsistence he must strive to get something more which he can sell or exchange for a cloth for himself and his wife, for a handful of salt and a drop of oil. If his labours yield no such margin, he may have to offer his services to the mission or the trader to earn the money to procure what he cannot provide himself. The Shilluk is, and indeed has to be, a man of all trades. To get the grain for his food he must farm the land, and although his methods of husbandry may be primitive, he is expert in the traditional way of farming. In fishing he is skilled in the use of the net, harpoon, spear and fish trap, and gets the best results possible from these methods. His house is neat and strongly built, and, according to one missionary of wide experience, is among the best thatched of all African houses. To cross the Nile on his fishing expeditions he must have a boat of some kind, and from a light, cork-like wood called ambach which grows plentifully in the Detwok area he constructs a beautiful, unsinkable canoe, light enough to be carried by one man, yet able to carry three people in perfect safety. To roof his house and make fences around it he uses the